

Summarised inspection findings

Monquhitter School

Aberdeenshire Council

5 February 2019

Key contextual information

Monquhitter Primary School is in the heart of the village of Cuminestown. The village was founded as a weavers' village in 1763. The present school is spacious and has extensive grounds. It is used by a variety of community groups. There are six classes and a full time nursery class. The school's rural setting means that many pupils are transported to school.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- There are very positive relationships between staff and children. Almost all children show respect, kindness and consideration to each other. Children are motivated and engaged in a range of learning activities which are differentiated to meet the needs of all learners. The school has had a focus of developing nurturing values to help children develop confidence and resilience in their learning. Teachers and support staff offer a range of learning approaches which help children to meet personal targets and raise attainment. Staff have made a strong start in improving literacy and numeracy through well planned programmes of learning pathways. The school should now build on the good practice in most classes and ensure that successful practice is consistent across the school.
- Across the school and nursery, all staff, lead by the headteacher, have caring and positive relationships with the children. All children feel safe, happy and confident in school. They are secure in seeking support when required. All children are proud of their school and happy to be there. They identify the caring staff as a contributing factor to their confidence in the school.
- Teachers are embracing changes in teaching approaches such as learning through play. Children are responding very well to structured learning in play which is embedding progression in literacy and numeracy across early level. This is resulting in improved attainment at the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. Teachers are increasing the range of contexts in which children learn and apply their skills. Children are applying their literacy and numeracy skills in other curriculum areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Working with partners, teachers are beginning to increase learning outdoors to capitalise on the local environment. The enterprise work on keeping hens and selling the eggs is self financing and is a very practical example of effective eco sustainability work. The school should now review their policy on outdoor learning to create a more progressive programme of skills development in this area.
- Children have many opportunities to develop leadership skills and take responsibility for decision making. They are members of pupil council, junior road safety officers, buddies for younger children and playground games leaders. In a few classes children take responsibility for aspects of leading their own learning. In these classes children work independently taking decisions to determine next steps in learning. The school recognises that there is scope to

develop this further to help children fully understand how to develop these skills in a consistent way across the whole school.

- Overall the quality of teaching across the school is good with examples of very good practice in some classes. Well planned training and professional development has supported teachers and support staff to have an increased focus and understanding of what constitutes effective learning and teaching. They are enthusiastic about their vision to provide consistently high quality learning and teaching experiences for all children from nursery to P7.
- A few observed lessons were overly teacher-led and the school should continue to develop and embed the recently introduced strategies to encourage children's involvement in planning and leading their own learning. In almost all observed lessons, instructions and explanations were clear and children aware of what they were learning. Most teachers make effective use of questioning to encourage children to think about prior learning and build on this. Children are enthusiastic about their learning and are eager to respond to teachers questions. Many learners are developing skills in relating their learning to real life contexts. The school should now provide more opportunities and challenges for children to apply their skills and understanding further in this area.
- Teachers use a range of summative and formative assessment to gauge young people's progress. They are making increasing use of national and local authority advice to ensure that assessment is becoming more robust. A range of interventions, funded through Pupil Equity Funding, is helping identified children make better progress in their learning. Classroom assistants are very effective in supporting children with additional needs. Staff are becoming more confident in their use of National Benchmarks to recognise achievement of a level.
- The headteacher knows each child very well and makes good use of the school's established data tracking system. Staff can clearly articulate where children are in literacy and numeracy and what is being done to improve their learning. Teachers are developing their skills in data analysis and are using data to track children's progress and identify if and where targeted interventions might be used to support children's learning. Tracking should be extended beyond literacy and numeracy to other areas of the curriculum including health and wellbeing. Tracking should also take account of children's engagement in classes and involvement in the wider school community and beyond. The school recognises this as an area for development and staff are working with colleagues in the cluster to develop holistic assessments to check children's understanding of learning in new contexts.
- Staff have opportunities to discuss children with previous teachers. Support staff are very involved and valued in this process. All staff appreciate the opportunity to have regular tracking meetings with the headteacher to monitor children's progress. These meetings are very useful to identify children's individual needs and ensure these are planned for. There are also two meetings per session where all staff monitor trends and any challenges across the whole school. Teachers work with the headteacher and support for learning teacher to put in place additional supports to address any barriers in learning. This approach ensures that children are well supported to achieve their potential.
- We have asked the school to continue their planned work on increasing attainment in literacy and numeracy and to continue to develop the good practice already begun to include children more consistently in planning their own learning across all areas of the curriculum.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. An area for development has been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Overall attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Curriculum for Excellence attainment data was provided for the last three years. The school recognises that its attainment data is variable over time. This attainment data is based on teachers' professional judgements and was previously supported by standardised tests. The school has started to use the National Benchmarks and also the information gathered through Scottish National Standardised Assessments for last session. Supported by the headteacher, class teachers submit attainment forecasts three times per year and the school has in place attainment meetings which focus on the analysis of data. With more confident and robust professional judgement alongside further professional development and a focus on moderation across and outwith the school, a more reliable picture of progress is beginning to be evident. The school's predictions for this session indicate an upward trend. The inspection team's activities support the school's prediction for levels to improve.
- Overall children's attainment in literacy and English language as outlined in the achievement of a level data is good by the end of P1 and P4 and satisfactory by the end of P7. During session 2017-18, the majority of children at P1, P4 and P7 were attaining appropriate levels in listening and talking and writing. At the same time, most children in P1 and P4 attained appropriate levels and the majority of children in P7 attained the appropriate level in reading.
- Staff should continue to engage in professional dialogue around their shared understanding and expectation of the literacy Curriculum for Excellence levels across the school. They should continue to moderate and refine approaches to ensure the progressive development of skills across the school. Emergent literacy approaches are being developed and staff continually review the progress and impact of this new approach.

Listening and talking

- Overall children's attainment in listening and talking is variable as evidenced in the data. Within classes and in focus groups there is evidence of children making good progress in developing and applying listening and talking skills across their learning.
- In almost all classes, children listen well and respond respectfully to each other. In all classes, children are eager to share their views and ideas with their teacher and each other. They follow the instructions given by their teachers. Across the school, there are opportunities for Show and Tell, short talks and debates but these are not part of a planned progressive programme running across the school. Children work confidently in pairs and collaborate in groups. Children listen attentively and show their understanding through engaging in the appropriate task or activity. Most children at first level can respond to different questions and work in pairs to agree on a response to a challenge. At this level they would benefit from deeper understanding of literal, inferential and evaluative questions. By P7 most children focus

on the points for discussion and prepare an appropriate response through 'Think, Pair and Share' strategies. The headteacher has rightly identified the need to ensure a clear progression pathway is in place for listening and talking and through this the foundations for more progress to be made in the other two literacy organisers will be supported.

Reading

- Overall children at all levels, engage in a range of reading activities which require a variety of skills. They make personal selections of reading material from the school library which has recently been refurbished. Most children at all levels can read familiar prepared texts with fluency and expression. They adopt appropriate strategies for their age and stage. They demonstrate confidence in reading aloud. Children at the early level use their knowledge of sounds, letters and rhyming patterns to decode and read simple texts. They practise their skills through engaging in structured play based activities e.g. find the letter in the sand. Most children on track to attain first level, are gaining confidence in developing a range of strategies to decode such as reading to the end of the sentence and breaking words into syllables. They can talk about different strategies which they use to aid their reading such as predicting and clarifying. They would benefit from revisiting the strategies of reciprocal reading skills of questioning, predicting, clarifying and summarising alongside their individual choices of individual readers. This will support children to better understand familiar and new texts. Within second level, almost all children are benefitting from the incentives and choice offered by an accelerated reader programme. Whilst the opportunity to select both fiction and non-fiction is facilitated within this programme, few children choose non-fiction material and as a result they are not confident in speaking about the layout of such texts. By P7 children are making personal choices with regard to favourite authors and can explain what they like about the writer's style. Overall, there is a need to further develop the children's knowledge of skills such as skimming and scanning and introduce higher order thinking skills and critical skills in literacy to further develop children's acquisition and understanding of these skills. Across all stages there is also the need to widen the range of genre and variety of authors accessed as there is a pattern forming of children's choices being limited to a group of key popular authors. There are opportunities to incorporate a Scottish dimension especially in light of the rich culture of the north east of Scotland. This is relevant for listening, talking and writing also.

Writing

- Within jotters and writing samples there is evidence of good writing. Generally standards of presentation and handwriting are good. Written work in jotters and as displayed on walls demonstrate that most children can include relevant ideas or information and organise and present the information logically. Children across all levels have opportunities to write for a variety of purposes linked to structured language related tasks and activities which focus on technical skills to aid their writing. Children at early level are forming lower case letters using a variety of writing tools. They are exploring the shapes of the letters through different sensory activities and a variety of materials. Staff should continue to monitor children's exploration of letter formations to ensure accurate formations when children are able to do so. Children at the early level are dictating their stories for scribing, over writing and under writing. A few children are identifying and reading tricky words and attempting to write them. Children within first level have experienced writing in a variety of genre. For example, a letter, imaginative story and recount and are beginning to use appropriate punctuation. At this stage, they would benefit from more opportunities to write at length other than through grammar and sentence exercises. By P7 children are familiar with different assessment strategies, self and peer assessment procedures and they benefit from focused teacher feedback in their writing. They can write at length incorporating scene setting, character development and descriptive sentences to engage the reader. Writing has also been identified as an area for further improvement and a review of approaches will be undertaken later this session.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall children's attainment in numeracy is good, as outlined in the achievement of a level data. Most children are on target to achieve appropriate national levels of achievement.
- Across all levels, the school has rightly identified that further work in developing mental agility strategies is required. This will ensure that children are equipped to make quick recall of number bonds and facts as well as having a variety of strategies to aid calculations in all numeracy and mathematical calculations. Teachers have already engaged in Mastery Approaches and undertaken professional development to support further progress.

Number, money and measure

- Within early level, children are engaging in a variety of structured play-based activities which promote learning in numeracy. Overall at the end of early level, most children are making good progress in acquiring numeracy skills. By P4, almost all children on track to achieve first level are competent in identifying place value to four digits. They can round numbers up to 100; calculate the sum of double numbers; and skip count in twos, fives, tens and hundreds. Children at this level can calculate change from £20. With swifter recall of number facts and bonds this will assist the children to make better use of money as a life skill. Children working at first level can tell the time using o'clock and half past. They are aware of the difference between analogue and digital time. Children can find the missing numbers in a simple algebraic equation with an unknown number including addition and multiplication. By P7, almost all children on track to achieve second level, are secure in their understanding of place value to 1,000,000. They can round numbers up and down and make appropriate estimations. They are also aware of positive and negative numbers and can identify contexts where this knowledge would be essential e.g. temperature when discussing weather. Children working at this level could talk about multiples and factors, identify equivalent fractions and they were able to simplify and expand fractions and make links with percentages. Those children on track to achieve second level were also able to share their understanding of average journey times and make calculations around time and distance. They can explain profit and loss and how this could be used. Children can find the missing numbers in a simple algebraic equation using multi-step reverse operations including addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

Shape, position and movement

- By second level children are aware of the difference between obtuse and acute angles. They calculate the size of angles in three and four sided figures. In observed lessons children were identifying lines of symmetry in everyday shapes.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- The school has a positive culture of recognising and celebrating children's achievements. Senior pupils speak enthusiastically of the success of their school of which they are proud. House Captains collect evidence of children's special achievements and proud moments for their house 'Star Wall'. Parents also contribute to this record. An 'In the News' booklet has been created to capture school achievements which have been reported in the local newspaper. The school is in the early stages of tracking wider achievement but there are good opportunities to develop skills through the four capacities and the headteacher recognises the need for a whole school approach to ensuring the progression of children's skills development. All children keep a Personal Learning Journal which records snapshots of their learning over their time in school. In a few examples, children are setting themselves personal targets. This is shared with parents and promotes the opportunity for parental involvement. There is a variety of sport activities for children to become involved in and they have enjoyed opportunities to take part in rugby, football and table tennis. There are various opportunities to learn to play a musical instrument and a link with the local pipe band supports children's participation in local performances. Friday groups promote children's involvement in planning

for whole school events and skills development. Through the eco group and looking after hens the children are aware of sustainability. They have experienced the importance of looking after creatures which produce food and they have used an enterprising approach to this project. Star Writer Awards are made in a few classes and examples of writing pieces are displayed within the classroom and on corridor walls.

Equity for all learners

- Sensitive interventions and nurturing principles are in evidence across the school and whilst additional supports are focused on a few learners, this was undertaken appropriately. Through practitioners' greater awareness of Specific Literacy Difficulties, they are embedding appropriate strategies within classes to support learners in order to ensure appropriate support where it is required, pupil profiles have been compiled and are reviewed with staff and parents to ensure key strengths and areas of need are identified. A next step in this valuable record would be to involve children in setting their own targets and evaluating their own learning. The school has identified the area of numeracy as an area for improvement in closing the attainment gap. New strategies, resources and additional support through teaching time is in place. This is at an early stage of development and the school has not yet been able to measure impact although an initial baseline assessment was undertaken. A residential trip to Loch Insh for the P7 children to join with other P7 children from the cluster group focuses on key health and wellbeing experiences and outcomes to ensure an effective transition to the secondary school. The school works towards ensuring that no child misses out on this experience.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.